

# Aerial at Home

## Sweet Circus Guidance



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“Can I get one of these to practise at home?” Is a question aerial instructors across the world are asked repeatedly and one that makes our hearts sink because we really don’t want to be that kill joy. In most circumstances, practicing at home is not a good idea, especially for children but there are steps you can take to make it safer. This document will highlight some of the risks and considerations involved in rigging and practising at home.

### **So why is it such a bad idea?**

Aerial Circus, in fact most circus activities are dangerous by nature, that is why people flock to the big top to be wowed and amazed by those who dare. Qualified Instructors are professionals who have spent many years and usually significant sums of money to learn, understand, and mitigate the risk factors and yet very few of us have home rigging. This is because the cost and logistics of rigging safely at home are usually prohibitive.

### **Rigging:**

It is very difficult to create a safe rig point at home, that big fat joist might look really strong, but it needs to take at least ten times your weight on top of doing the job it was designed for in order to be safe to rig from. As a rule of thumb, the structure you wish to rig from needs to be able to hold a car, as does whatever kind of rig point you use, and if this rig point is in some way screwed into or through the supporting structure, the structure’s strength is reduced. You will need a structural engineer, an aerial performance rigger, or probably both to assess your structure and advise you on what is possible.

In almost all cases some serious structural reinforcement will be needed, such as inserting a steel I beam. You will also need to have a good knowledge of the weights and forces at play (dynamic aerial can generate more than 5 times the weight of the aerialist and equipment).

A home rig point will most likely invalidate your home or building insurance and finding a company that are prepared to cover you is not easy.

**Can I rig from my climbing frame?** Absolutely not, domestic climbing frames are not designed to take the forces generated by aerial circus and whilst some commercial ones might be they are not designed for and have not been tested for this kind of application.

**Can I rig from a tree?** Again no. Whilst it is not impossible, rigging safely from a tree is even harder and more costly than rigging safely in your home. An arborist is needed to first determine the health of the tree, a rigger will be needed to work out what forces will and can be applied. The rigging branch needs to be secured to the trunk to reinforce its attachment to the branch. Redirect lines and fail safes need to be installed and you need to learn how to use them.

Throwing a strop or rope over a big branch really is not an option unfortunately, trees can and do randomly shed branches, like a snake sheds it’s skin, it really is not worth the risk; not only could you fall but then become crushed by the branch.

**How about scaffolding?** This is possible, you will need to hire both a qualified scaffolder and rigger, but this can provide a safe solution.

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**Well, what can I do then?** The safest way to get this level of training is through private lessons and studio space hire – in many cases this is the most cost-effective solution also. If you really must rig at home the very best and usually the cheapest option is to purchase a professionally designed and made portable aerial rig from a reputable company. We like (and use) both the X-pole A frame, (<https://x-pole.co.uk/shop/aerial/a-frame/xpole-a-frame/> you get a priority service for this if you order through us!) or the Circuspex home rig (<http://circuspex.co.uk/products/home-rig-type-b> ).

You will also need a good quality gymnastic mat / crash mat and of course the equipment and auxiliaries. These all need to be rated and tested for the appropriate loads and conform with various regulations. Please do not buy any equipment from Amazon, Ebay, Etsy etc, as there is plenty of unsafe equipment out there!

[www.firetoys.com](http://www.firetoys.com) is a trusted supplier but you still need an understanding of how to calculate the forces you will be generating, how much available load you have and how to set the equipment up properly. Even small details, such as which way round the Karabiners are, is important. As professional aerialists we still regularly consult with riggers!

Get yourself onto an aerial rigging course such as the one run by High Performance Rigging (<http://www.highperformanceproductions.net/Training.html> ). This will not qualify you as a rigger but will give you essential knowledge to understand what is and is not likely to be safe.

### **Safe Training:**

As mentioned before the instructors who teach you are qualified experts in their field, they have learned how to breakdown and teach you how to safely get into and out of positions. When something goes wrong they are able to rescue you, support you to dismount safely or guide you out of the position and back to safety. Books, DVDs, YouTube and Instagram tutorials are no substitute for this. They can't see you, they can't keep you safe, and unless your parent or friend who is going to supervise you is a qualified aerial instructor, they can't keep you safe either! Instructors have knowledge of the body's energy systems, the muscles and joints you are using, and how to prevent future muscular skeletal injuries or conditions that can arise out of incorrect technique. They are constantly checking your muscle engagement and alignment, looking for signs of fatigue that you are not aware of, and keeping you focussed and safe. Why do you think we are always nagging you about your shoulders?

### **So, how can you safely train outside of classes?**

#### **Private Lessons:**

If you are looking to increase your progress and learning curve, private lessons are the best way to achieve this. Your instructor will work with you to identify goals and design sessions specifically to work towards them. You do not have to wait or take turns with other students but you will still be spotted and kept safe by a qualified professional.

#### **Open Practise:**

Many studios also run open practise or studio hire sessions where you can go and train on professionally installed equipment in a safe environment with a qualified instructor on hand should something go wrong, or you just need a little guidance. To make the most of this time book an occasional private lesson with your instructor who can advise you on what is safe for you personally to practise, and what you should be practising to reach your goals.

#### **Strength, Conditioning, Flexibility:**

If you want to be able to train at home consider a strength, conditioning and flexibility programme. This can be done with no equipment at all, or, if you want to spend a few pennies, equipment such as resistance bands, kettle bells and pull up bars are good, reasonably priced options. Book a private lesson with your instructor who can work with you to design a training programme which will focus on the progress you need to reach your aerial potential.

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## **But I still want to rig at home!**

Despite all this we know that some of you will still desperately want to rig at home and will do so despite our advice not to! If that is the case here is our list of absolute musts and a few things to consider:

- Ensure you have professionally made adequately rated equipment and you know how to set it up safely.
- Invest in a good quality gymnastic / crash mat and always use it.
- Never, ever train alone.
- Book a private lesson every 4 to 6 weeks to go over and adjust your training plan. It is a good idea to also bring your parent or the person who will be supervising you to be taught a few simple spotting techniques to accompany your training plan.
- Do not attempt to teach anyone, unless you are a qualified instructor.

## **Questions:**

- Why do you want to do aerial at home so badly? We know aerial is addictive, but be honest with yourself, it is unlikely to be cheaper than attending more classes or having private lessons and as highlighted above there are many ways to progress your aerial capabilities without even leaving the floor, and instructors will make time in class for pictures and videos to show friends and family.
- How are you going to prevent friends / family / guests from pestering you to let them have a go? Without aerial specific training you are unlikely to be able to do this safely, as mentioned before you can cause damage that is not evident until years later, and they can sue you should any injury occur.
- Parents – are you 100% certain you can prevent your children and their friends from 'playing' on the equipment without you supervising?
- Are you / the person supervising you a 1<sup>st</sup> aider? Will you / they know what to do if something goes wrong?

As mentioned at the beginning, we do not want to be the Kill Joys of the world! But our professional advice when asked about home rigging is - don't do it. So far as healthy risk goes, our ethos is – "bruises make you better, broken bones do not", training at home without a qualified instructor can do far worse than break bones.

Sweet Circus take no responsibility for any injuries or damage to property as a result of training outside of our sessions **even** if you follow our guidance here. *n.b. Training under the supervision of a qualified and insured instructor is also subject to separate disclaimers.*

That said we know that there are circumstances where the only other option is to miss out entirely and so we make this information available to ensure those who choose to rig at home, have some guidance on how to do more safely.

Circus is great fun, and fantastic personal development, but it is also dangerous, please circus safely!